Cuba's Comedy of Errors in Which the Hun Lost Out

How Menocal Kept His Place as President Despite German Intrigues

By L. J. de Bekker

HAVANA, March 27.—Cuban politics really isn't any worse than our American brand except in quantity. But it is on tap the whole year, which leads to the formation of evil habits. As the only intoxicant Cubans use to excess it is a fit subject for a national prohibition propaganda, but prohibition is a dreadful word to these people, who have not been independent long enough to be able to distinguish between liberty and license. The present government is so tolerant, indeed, that only the most flagrant cases of personal abuse are rebuked, and if politicians would confine themselves to statistical lies, economic lies or lies in the abstract they might say what they please with impunity. Certain lies are invented exclusively for export consumption, and there is a junta in New York, with ramifications in Washington and elsewhere, which attends to distribution in the United States.

The finest specimen of the lie personal-political exported from Havana in several years was being spread abroad when I left New York, and may by now have got into print. It represented, not without some circumstantiality of detail, that President Menocal was actually hand in glove with the Germans throughout the war, and that in this disloyalty to the United States he was aided and abetted in every way by William E. Gonzales, the American Minister to Cuba. Knowing both gentlemen and having visited Cuba three times prior to the entrance of our country into war, the last time largely for the purpose of distributing French propaganda, I smiled at this story. But perhaps I was wrong. The average American feels a sympathetic interest in this country, and a thrill of pride on thinking of Uncle Sam's share in the War of Liberation, but if he knows the Cuba of to-day except as the island which provides him with sugar and tobacco he is not the average American.

To ask either the President or the American minister to dignify this fabrication by denial is unthinkable.

Air Filled With Plots

The easiest method of refutation is to tell the story of what happened in Cuba two years ago, as briefly as may be, for the material is ample for history, for tragedy and for comic opera.

The Cuban election of 1916, like that in the United States, had been close. Apparently, however, General Menocal had been reëlected by a safe margin. Owing to a difference in the election system, although the result was known definitely in the case of Messrs. Wilson and Hughes three days after the polls closed, a positive statement concerning Cuba was impossible, owing to contests in certain districts and by-elections in others. General Menocal could only say that he had no desire to hold office except at the mandate of the people, and that he would exert all his authority to secure an honest count.

The Liberal leaders, who had opposed General Menocal with Dr. Alfredo Zayas, Vice-President of the republic during the Presidency of José Miguel Gomez, at once raised the cry of fraud, and began an agitation with the object of securing the intervention of the United States. The election cases continued to drag in the courts.

Although Cuba was 3,000 miles away from the war, the situation was not without interest to Downing Street or Wilhelmstrasse. Later Mr. Hoover's busy press agent was to tell Americans "Sugar Will Win the War," and if this was not altogether true it was undeniably true that all Europe felt a gluttonous interest in the country which grows half the world's sugar crop.

Cuba was honeycombed in those days with German intrigue.

And German financial interests were strong.

Finger in Every Pie

The head of the German money power was Hermann Upmann, member of an influential banking family in the Vaterland, and, except for his avowed Teutonic sympathies, a likable sort. The Upmanns had been cigar manufacturers and bankers in the Spanish period, and were outwardly loyal to the new Cuba. And Hermann Upmann, almost a Cuban himself, was a devotee of sport, a clubman, a heavy investor in every new enterprise. If money were needed for a new sugar mill and the banks held back, Hermann Upmann's purse was open. If the rail interests required funds for expension, Upmann saw a sound investment while other men were thinking it over. He was the private banker of nearly every public man in Cuba, not excepting President Menocal himself.

The Teuton diplomatic and consular forces, the German business houses in all parts of the island, relied upon Upmann's judgment in many, if not most, matters.

In a small way the Austrian Consul to Santiago was the Upmann of Eastern Cuba. Having lived in the Province of Oriente nearly twenty years, he knew everybody and had his finger in every pie. He was even president of the Santiago "Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce," and as such looked upon as an American by the import and export interests there. Otto Reimer, former American Consul to Santiago, spoke of him as "the one man who knew Oriente," and Mr. Reimer's successor was constantly in his company.

Oriente, being remote from the seat of government, was the natural terrain for an uprising, especially as it was the stronghold of the Liberal party.

So in January, 1917, a dock strike started in Santiago which proved very troublesome. The demands of the longahoremen were not unreasonable, but the president of the "Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce" felt that a principle was involved upon which he could not yield, and prevented a settlement.

An American newspaper man conveyed the information to the American Consul that a New York German house was about to smuggle through a cargo of rifles and ammunition destined either for Santiago or Port-au-Prince. The president of the Chamber of Commerce was able in his capacity as Austrian Consul to assure his American colleague that this was a trifling matter.

Then the Governor of the Province of Oriente received a code message from the government at Havana warning him that two army officers in Santiago were conspiring against the republic. The Governor sent for these two officers, and, having read the message to them, assured them of his complete confidence in their honor and sent them away.

Comedy Of Errors

After that events moved swiftly.

They had to. The last of the by-elections was five days off, and the Presidency of Cuba hung in the balance. Having cried fraud for months, the Liberal patriots took the field without waiting for the election, the two army officers arrested the Governor of Oriente in his palace, and, installing themselves in his place, sent him to the jail where he should have incarcerated them.

The Austrian Consul, in his capacity of president of the "Cuban-American Chamber of Commerce," sent an appeal to President Wilson to intervene.

The American Consul declined to send reports to the American Legation or to take orders from the American Minister.

Marines were ordered from Hayti to reinforce those at the Guantanamo naval station, and the United States flag was soon flying from the hills above Santiago.

Then somebody in the navy blundered. The American forces recognized the de facto military governor of Oriente, instead of setting free the imprisoned governor de jure. The American forces turned back Cuban naval vessels which came to re-take the city, and finally issued a general warning against armed forces attempting to cross the borders of Oriente, thus preventing the legitimate government from asserting its authority.

Sugar Mills Burned

Thus far a comedy of errors, the insurrection had gained sufficient force to become dangerous. The Liberals assumed that they were being backed by the United States until a proclamation issued by the American Minister in Havana undeceived them, and it was then too late.

Lawless elements in the central as well as the eastern portion of the island had taken the field, and were demonstrating their patriotism in the simplest and most effective manner, looting towns, robbing plantations and setting fire to cane fields and mills. The cheapest sort of a sugar mill these days costs a million dollars to build, and can be destroyed by a single wax vesta in the hand of a man who knows how to use it, and these Liberal patriots did.

The outcome of the insurrection was never for a moment in doubt.

The naval authorities reversed orders on the recognition of the de facto governor of Oriente.

The marines ceased to fraternize with Liberal patriots.

The Presidential by-elections were held at the appointed time, and as the Liberal patriots were out burning sugar mills, the Conservatives, who stayed at home, had the voting all their own way, and President Menocal's second term was assured beyond the peradventure of a doubt.

Readers to whom the details I have given are new will recall the defeat of the Liberals in the field and the capture of ex-President Gomez, their commander in chief.

The extreme leniency of President Menocal is also known.

Gomez was kept in prison for a time, then allowed to retire to his plantation under guard; then his property, which had been forfeited by armed rebellion, was largely restored and he was permitted to go to New York. Even the rebels in the army were tenderly dealt with.

Woe to Liberals

Dr. Zayas, who received a contract from the government when he was Vice-President to write a history of Cuba at $500 a month, is still at work on that monumental tome, and is said to have completed the sixth chapter. He was never molested in any way, and is to-day the acting head of the Liberal party.

The American Consul at Santiago has been replaced.

The Austrian Consul is interned.

Hermann Upmann is interned.

All is quiet in Oriente and the republic still lives.

By way of epilogue, theme for a farce. Five Liberal patriots, including the two officers who had imprisoned the governor of Oriente and usurped his authority, decided to quit the field of honor while the going was good. Naturally, as true Liberals, they had enforced loans from the banks of Santiago, and, besides storing away a small cargo of gold in a schooner, they sewed quantities of bank notes into their clothing and sailed for Hayti. In Port-au-Prince the Cuban chargé d'affaires was best known to his dear colleagues as an entomologist, for the business of diplomacy is of the lightest in that lovely country. He collected many beautiful objects besides beetles and butterflies, but undoubtedly the five Liberal patriots were the largest insects that ever fell to his net. It took the best tailors in the United States Marine Corps two days to dig the green and yellow backs out of patriotic clothing, and when they finished the job charity covered the nakedness of the Liberal patriots, who were allowed to depart for the United States.

Menocal's Message to America

By MARIO G. MENOCAL
President of the Republic of Cuba

The idea of a league of nations has always occupied a prominent place in the minds of Latin-American statesmen and thinkers, and among its advocates in one form or another may be counted Simón Bolivar, liberator of a whole continent; José Enrique Rodó, eminent philosopher and thinker, and our own José Marti, the Apostle of Cuban liberty.

The subject is certainly one that appeals to the heart and imagination of all right-thinking men, and those now gathered in Paris to insure a return of the much-longed-for durable peace can set themselves no worthier task. Certainly no man is more fitted than President Wilson to be the exponent and champion of this cause. He has consecrated a lifetime to the pursuit of an ideal, and the hour seems not too far distant now when the world may hope to reap the results of his efforts, even if tempered by the political necessities and economic difficulties of the moment.

Such a league of nations has the warm approval and support of all Latin-American countries, particularly Cuba, as it will tend to make war an improbability and insure the continuance of peace based on just and equitable conditions; above all, it will guarantee to the small nations their place in the concert of civilization without vexatious and unjust limitations in their development as self-governing nationalities. I hope and believe that present difficulties, momentarily in the way of the attainment of such an end, will soon be disposed of and that the inauguration of the league will coincide with a new era of glory and prosperity for all the nations represented at the conference.

The Labor Problem

The labor problem in Cuba, while requiring earnest study and tactful handling, has not been accompanied by the serious tendencies characteristic of a like movement in Europe and the greater part of America, and the wave of Bolshevism, which is probably one of the most unfortunate and regrettable legacies of the war, has not, so far, made its influence felt in Cuba, except in isolated instances by an occasional oratorical outburst from some foreign agitator who makes his living by stirring up the passions of workmen, whom he tries to persuade that the only way in which they can better their lot is by paying him an enormous salary to go around the country making incendiary speeches and provoking walkouts.

Our strikes have generally originated in the interpretation of the current relations between capital and labor, abstract terms these that usually say too much or too little. Employers and workmen have, however, always ended by coming to an understanding on a practical basis, leaving aside untried, and usually impracticable, theories. At the instance of both sides, the government, though hampered by a lack of adequate legislation on the subject, has often intervened, generally with success, in the settlement of controversies. Never has it been forced to take other than customary police precautions to prevent disturbances of the public peace, even in the recent unprecedented general strike that, in nine out of ten of the large cities in either the Old or the New World, would have given rise to lamentable occurrences.

It may be opportune here to call attention to the fact that during the period of the duration of the war Cuba had not a single strike of any importance. This speaks very highly of the Cuban workman's patriotism and is in favorable contrast with the attitude assumed by certain elements of the labor classes in other countries who, with the enemy knocking at their gates, might have been expected to await a more auspicious moment to press their claims.

The Farce, Mingled With Tragedy, in Which American Marines Had Part

Visiting Ireland Like Exploring a Volcano

By Samuel Crowther

IRELAND is either very near to a settlement of her troubles or very near to the greatest uprising she has ever known. For possibly the first time in history there is something which might be called an agreement of purpose in the various parties and factions. Although they express themselves in very different formulas and have no agreement in words or modes, all the parties seem to have concurred on one thing—the advancement of Ireland. This is very significant to the outsider, who has been accustomed to see that fair little land used only as a weapon of hate against England, or as an instrument with which to carve out personal fortunes.

The end of Irish politics to-day is Ireland; the animating force is love of country and not hate of another country. The Ireland of to-day is not brooding over past wrongs; the most extreme revolutionaries do not breathe a fraction of the blood and slaughter which one may hear at any Irish meeting in America. This new Ireland does not forget the many wrongs of omission and commission at the hands of England, but she is not living in them; she uses them as examples of administrative ineptness to show that England never has, and does not now, know how to govern the country. New Ireland is interested in promoting the economic and social welfare of the land. All are united on that point, and all are determined that immediate steps shall be taken to promote it.

If those steps are not taken there will be trouble. If steps are taken which they consider to be at variance with those aims, then a splendidly organized rebellion will break out, and this rebellion will have the support of those who, in former years, would not countenance an appeal to arms.

That is my estimate of the condition of Ireland to-day, as I gained it from traveling about the country, talking with rich and poor, with political leaders and with voters—Sinn Féiners, Unionists and Nationalists, and that large body of voters, the body which holds the ultimate power, the people. The mass of the people, for the time being, are not of any party, but they voted for Sinn Féin in order to see if that party could get the definite action which the Nationalist party did not get.

Says He Is Sitting On a Volcano

It is not an easy estimate to make, for, as the Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, said, "In Ireland the inevitable never happens and the impossible always occurs." A member of the Local Government Board told me he was sitting on a volcano that might burst into eruption at any minute; but he had been sitting on that volcano for thirty years and, although it had frequently erupted, the particular crater on which he sat had not yet been in action, so he was beginning to think that perching on it was really a natural way to live. Preparations for trouble do not of necessity mean trouble. Declarations are not always to be taken at their face values. For instance, the County Council of Cork not long since passed a resolution that Ireland was a free nation and owed allegiance to no earthly power, but the next business which they took up at that meeting was a petition for the approval by the Local Government Board of sundry enactments which they had made, and they ended the meeting with a strong petition to the Crown for a grant of money for something or other.

Many of the most ardent of the rank and file of the Sinn Féiners are drawing out-of-work money from the British government at the rate of twenty-nine shillings a week—which happens to be just one shilling less than they could earn by working six days a week as farm laborers! I saw a long queue of them waiting at Carlow for their weekly stipend. It was rather a cold day and they had been waiting quite a while. I heard one of them say:

"Sure and don't we earn it standing here in the cold?"

Another surveying the assembly with a critical eye, chimed in:

"And, indeed, small enough it is, considering the company you have to keep."

These were all perfectly able-bodied men who were out of work only because they would rather take the allowance than work, and they saw nothing incongruous in denying the rule of England in one breath and asking money from her in the next.

The Irish sense of humor is purely objective, which is probably one of the reasons that the Irish and the English so totally fail to understand each other; for the Irishman sees a joke in every one but himself, while the Englishman does see a joke on himself but seldom on any one else.

The Real Irish Nature Can't Be Put in Words

It would be quite easy to go about Ireland picking up these contradictions and to arrive at the conclusion that all Ireland needed in the way of government was a Tim Sullivan who would go along the streets passing out coins to the needy. But any such conclusion would be viciously away from the truth, for alms taking, whether by public bodies or by individuals, does not represent the spirit of Ireland to-day. The real Irish nature is something which cannot be put down in words, but that part of it which seems to consist in wanting to get something for nothing is only the survival of the days when the Irishman had nothing but his mud-walled cabin and the right to starve on whiskey and potatoes. In those days any extra penny was as manna from heaven, and to be accepted without question except after the event. Those days have passed.

The Irishman of to-day is a landowner. The former tenant farmer has, in most cases, bought his holding and is comfortably paying for it over a period that exceeds half a century, and the annual payments are very much less than the rent he formerly paid. This is under the land act, and although the extremists say that the act permits the farmer to buy back only what was already his in right, the farmers themselves are content to be less historical and more concrete. The farm laborers are coming into their own, and while all are not yet housed, a great number of them, perhaps a majority, have solid and, in many cases, most artistic little houses, with sizable plots of ground, for which they pay but one shilling a week in rent. The farm laborer is better off in Ireland than in America. It is true that he commonly gets but thirty shillings a week, but his house at one shilling is infinitely better than the average American farmhouse; he can raise nearly all his own vegetables and food for his livestock, and if we consider that he can have employment through fifty-two weeks of the year if he desires it, because of the mildness of the Irish winter—the American must be laid off during the coldest months—then perhaps he actually gets higher wages on the annual reckoning. Certainly he is given a greater purchasing power than his American brother—his wage means more. And in educational facilities rural Ireland does not seem more backward than rural America.

Dublin and Cork Still Have Their Slums

The case with the city man is different. Dublin still has its slums, and so has Cork, and they are as terrible as ever in spite of the employment given by the war. When I visited the Dublin slum sections—Meath, Mercer, York, Railroad Street and so on—there was about an inch of slush on the ground, yet I saw more children barefooted than shod, and what clothing they had was so worn and tattered as to make one shiver in a kind of reflex way. The slums are an incident of unemployment; in normal times there have always been more people wanting jobs in Dublin and in all the other cities of Ireland than there were jobs. Belfast during the war has been full of work, but the common condition of that industrial centre is also to have a surplus of workers; but in Belfast the workers are skilled, while in the other parts of the country they are unskilled.

All political programmes of the past have turned upon the holding of the land by the tillers as the economic bait, with Home Rule within the empire as the emotional bait—for no political party ever gets anywhere in Ireland or any other country unless it can promise to provide food for both the stomach and the mind. The groups in Ireland which for years past have clung to the standard of a republic have never had any great following, except when they happened to make their risings coincide with an economic need. When the farmers were able to buy their own land, and evictions, rent raisings, and the like became a thing of the past, the force of Home Rule was lost, for it lost its economic appeal and had left only the appeal to history. Irish independence became an academic subject in which all were interested to a large degree, but for which only a few highly emotional persons were willing to fight. As a farmer said to me:

"We have our land and a good living, even if we do not see much money. The landlords are gone. Some of them were bad and some were good, but how can I help my children and myself by fighting about something which happened years ago? We are not treated fairly by England to-day, and if a republic will help us, I am for a republic; but if a republic means that we cannot sell our produce to England, then I am against it. We are shipping 5,000 head of fine cattle out of Dublin every week, and if we lose that market where are we?"

This Is the Opinion of the Great Majority

I think that expresses fairly accurately the opinion of the great majority of Irish landowners to-day. Being human beings and having property at stake, they have no intention of following will-o'-the-wisps over hill and dale and no desire to be at one with their forefathers, ranging like animals among the hills and mountains. This is not to say that they are sordid, for on the contrary they are in the highest degree romantic, but the responsibilities of ownership and direction cause them to think twice before accepting the statement of the republican that he and his fellows make up the panacea for all administrative ills. The phrase "Irish Republic" needs translation for them; they have noticed that the most avid advocates of that ideal form happen to be largely schoolmasters who expect to do the governing, or "professional Irishmen" who hope to have a new fund to conquer. The Irish farmer has not that sweet trustfulness of schoolmasters which the rest of the world so recently had.

So much for the landed man. The worker in the city is in a different case. The old theory being that the north was industrial and the south agricultural, the southern programme for the betterment of Ireland scarcely recognized that such a thing as a city laborer existed. All the reforms went to the land, where the majority of the population lived and from which they had to draw their prosperity. "Jim" Larkin was the first man to give serious attention to the south of Ireland labor policy, and he organized the celebrated strike on the Dublin docks and then went on to the formation of the Transport Workers' Union, which has to-day become a union of all unskilled men, as opposed to the craft unions, which are affiliated with similar English unions.

The Irish Transport Union was further developed and given its ideas by James Connolly. These ideas were such as he had picked up among the Socialists of Europe, and he transformed what started out to be a defensive union into a potentially offensive proletarian movement. The union is being joined by farm laborers everywhere, on the promise that all land will be divided and that only the producers shall rule. The arguments are exactly the same as those advanced by the Bolsheviki in Russia, and the laborers firmly believe that the movement in Russia has been successful. They are so told in their own newspapers, and they are trained to regard as "capitalistic lies" anything to the contrary that appears in the ordinary daily press. One of the most difficult things to contend with in Irish politics is that no partisan takes as true that which does not appear in the sheet of his own particular party.

The Belfast Strike a Bolshevik Movement

The official labor parties in and about Belfast are not Bolshevik, but the unofficial or anti-craft unions have there gained great power, and the recent shipyard strike was, in common with the Belfast strike, a Bolshevik movement. And whereas the north and the south of Ireland were supposed never to have anything in common now they have among the workers a complete understanding of a hazy social programme which is more powerful than their former religious differences.

Now comes the curious paradox of the present situation, out of which almost anything may spring. The original Sinn Féin party was one of introspection; they were students of the Irish language who wanted to write poems, revive dances and get the Gaelic bagpipe working on the old tunes. As a movement they were not essentially political at the outbreak of the war. They held that an independent Ireland was historically correct, but only those who were more caught by the note of eternal, sacrificial sorrow than the note of joy that runs through Irish literature had any thought of attaining a republic by the offering of life. Padraic Pearse, for example, the president of the Irish republic of 1916—the republic of the Easter Rising—wanted to give his life for Ireland. His was purely an emotional offering and only incidentally political—"What matter when for Erin dear we fall."

That Easter Rising—I have talked with those who know it from the inside—was a sordid thing. It was engineered from New York, and it had to be, because the so-called Irish in New York could not otherwise keep on getting money from the Germans. Sir Roger Casement had failed with his recruiting scheme in Germany, the New Yorkers had failed with their peace societies and munition embargo conspiracies, and they had to show their German paymasters something to put on the previously blank vouchers. Sinn Fein was against the rising as a body, and the Sinn Féiners who went into it did so as individuals in an excess of enthusiasm. Part of those men went to their death in the delusion that they were helping Ireland, while others, especially those under James Connolly, saw a chance to begin the class war. They took death as bravely as men could and without the remotest notion that they were being used as human vouchers for German money.

Sinn Feiners Condemned the Easter Rebellion

The Easter Rebellion was in the hands of the Citizens' Army, a labor organization. Many leading Sinn Féiners condemned the movement, and so did the whole people of Ireland. Never was there a more universally condemned riot than that one. They were Irish soldiers who fought the rebels—and with a will. More Irish were killed in the battles on the English side than on the Irish. The rebellion was suppressed and the people were glad of it, and asked that the ringleaders be suitably punished.

Here it was that the English, through the War Department, made a very unpopular rebellion into a popular one and massed all shades of opinion solidly against England. Instead of arresting the ringleaders, charging them with crime, and then proving that they had actually killed citizens or soldiers and that they were working in the interest of Germany, the War Department, which can be trusted never to miss a mistake, scooped in men by the score, tried them by field court-martial in the utmost secrecy, and executed them forthwith. After the executions they made short and stilted announcements in military fashion. The public did not know who most of the condemned were, and as day after day came these curt obituaries of unknowns, it began to get on the public nerves, and they were ready to believe the tales that hundreds more had been shot and buried in remote places. Finally a lunatic officer at Portobello Barracks arrested Sheehy Skeffington and several companions and shot them without trial. Skeffington was an ardent pacifist who had nothing whatsoever to do with the rebellion, and could not have had from his very nature.

Then the people of Ireland turned from their abhorrence of the rebellion to an abhorrence of the English rule; they made heroes out of those whom they would have regarded as criminals. I have said that Sinn Féin had nothing to do with the rebellion; but the stupidity of Sir John Maxwell in charge of the English forces laid it at the door of Sinn Féin, and that body, seeing that public opinion had turned for the rebels, accepted the charge and made capital out of it.

Sinn Féin had greatness thrust upon it, and it is the present position of Sinn Féin that makes Ireland such a touch and go affair right now.